



# Australian Bureau of Statistics

## 1370.0 - Measures of Australia's Progress, 2004

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### Introduction

**Measures of Australia's Progress** (MAP) reflects on issues of importance to Australia and Australians, and no systematic or comprehensive attempt has been made elsewhere in this publication to compare Australia's progress with that in other countries. But considering Australian progress side-by-side with progress in other countries can be informative: apparent progress in a dimension, say increases in life expectancy, might seem less (more) impressive if they are slower (quicker) than improvements in life expectancy overseas.

This article compares the level of Australia's progress with that of other countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Information about a range of progress dimensions - **Health, Education and training; Work; The natural landscape; The human environment; International environmental concerns; and National income** - is presented. The article begins with some background information about population size and growth in different member states.

Most of the data used here comes from the OECD. Not all of MAP's headline dimensions of progress are discussed in this essay: few internationally comparable data are available for some areas. Moreover, for the dimensions that are discussed, we typically use indicators that are somewhat different from those used as headline indicators of Australian progress. To draw international comparisons we have had to use available data, and so have chosen the best approximation of the Australian progress indicators used elsewhere in this publication. Some of the difficulties inherent in drawing comparisons between countries are discussed in the box opposite.

In each area, Australia's progress is compared with a range of OECD countries. A core set of countries are included in each comparison - Canada, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, the UK and the USA - together with the highest and lowest performing OECD member states in each area.

### Population

Australia covers 7.7 million square kilometres. Among the OECD member states, only Canada (10 million square kilometres) and the USA (9.4 million square kilometres) are larger. But Australia has fewer people than many OECD countries. In 2001, Australia's population was about 19 million. By comparison, about 286 million people lived in the USA, 127 million in Japan, 60 million in the UK, 57 million in Italy, 31 million in Canada, and four million in New Zealand.

Because of our relatively large land mass and small population, Australia's population density was, in 2001, among the lowest in the OECD: at about three people per square kilometre, we rank alongside Canada and Iceland as the least densely populated of OECD nations (although of course parts of Australia are more densely populated, as are parts of Canada and Iceland). In comparison, South Korea was the most densely populated country (476 people per square kilometre), while there were 244 people per square kilometre living in the UK, and 30 people for each square kilometre of the USA.

### The difficulty in drawing international comparisons

When considering a nation's progress, or quality of life, it is often desirable to compare levels and rates of progress with those of other countries. But there are two main reasons why international comparisons are not possible for all the dimensions and indicators used in **Measures of Australia's Progress**.

- **Comparable Dimensions:** Some of MAP's dimensions cover aspects of progress that are (almost) uniquely Australian. For example salinity (a form of land degradation) is not a significant problem in many other countries. Restricting our measures of progress to cover only those areas of concern for which international data were available would have forced us to neglect areas of progress important to Australia.
- **Comparable indicators:** For most of MAP's dimensions, however, some international data are available. But it can be misleading to compare different data sets. For some indicators, say life expectancy at birth, where there is an agreed international definition, comparisons are valid. For other indicators, say crime rates, differences might be influenced by compiling practices. For other indicators, say the number of people with degrees, differences might be influenced by university curriculum standards. The quality of statistical data can also vary.

## Progress outside the OECD

This essay focuses on Australia's progress compared to that of the 30 OECD member states: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

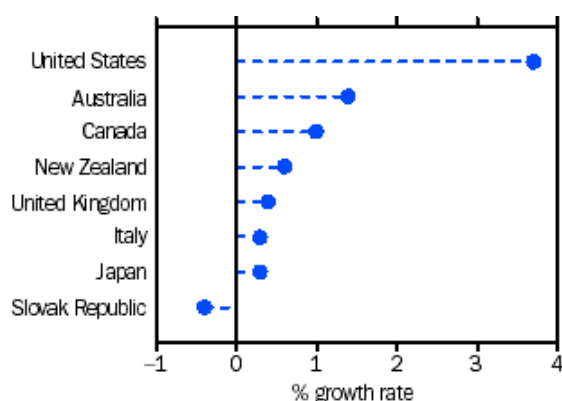
There are many other countries that readers might wish to compare Australia's progress with. We focus here on the OECD, primarily because there are a good deal of internationally comparable data to draw on (more so than for most other groups of countries).

## Comparing OECD data with ABS figures

Most of the figures used in this article come from the OECD. In some cases they differ from data used elsewhere in this, or other, ABS publications. This is because, in order to draw international comparisons, the OECD sometimes use different classifications or data sources to those used by the ABS, or adjust ABS data.

Australia's population grew more quickly than many members of the OECD. Our rate of growth between 2000 and 2001 was 1.4%, alongside that of Iceland and Ireland, and behind only the USA (3.7%) and Turkey (1.7%). Fifteen OECD nations' grew by less than 0.5% between 2000 and 2001.

### Population growth rates, 2000 to 2001



Source: OECD World in Figures, 2003.<sup>1</sup>

## National income

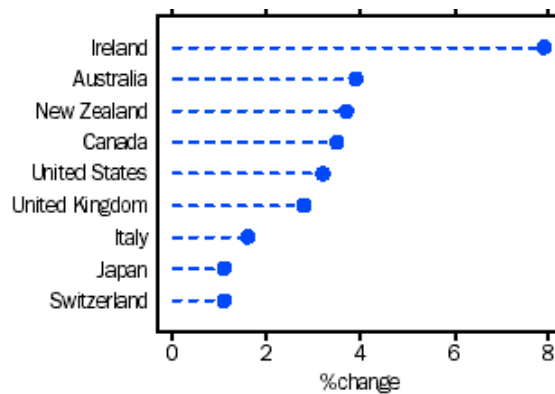
Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is a measure commonly used to compare countries' national incomes.

Between 1992 and 2002, only five OECD countries saw their total GDP grow more quickly than the Australian average rise of 3.9% a year. Growth was highest in Ireland, where GDP grew by an average of 7.9% annually. Growth across the whole of the OECD was more modest, averaging about 2.8% a year, and

was weakest in Japan and Switzerland: GDP in both countries grew by an annual average of 1.1% over the ten-year period.

In 2002, Australia's per capita GDP, adjusted for purchasing power parity (i.e., adjusted to account for the different costs of living in different countries) was 10% above the OECD average. Luxembourg, whose per capita GDP was twice the OECD average, had the highest GDP per capita among the OECD members. Turkey's per capita GDP was the lowest in the OECD, at only a quarter of the OECD's average. In 1999 the OECD categorised Australia as falling into a group of 'high-middle income' countries. The group also included Italy, Canada, Japan and the United Kingdom.

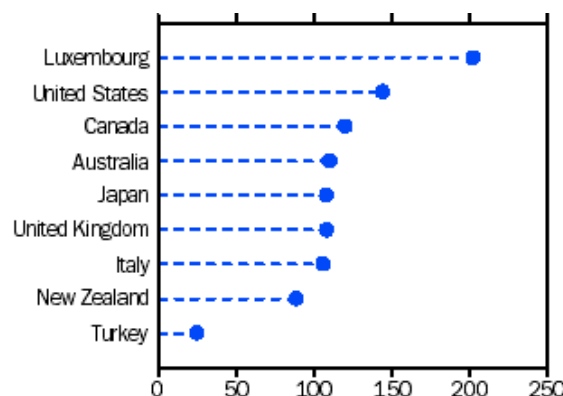
#### Average annual GDP(a) growth, 1992 to 2002



(a) Average annual volume change.

Source: OECD World in Figures, 2003. <sup>1</sup>

#### Gross domestic product per capita, 2002 (a)(b)



(a) Calculated using purchasing power parities. (b) OECD average = 100.

## Health

Life expectancy at birth is one of the most widely used indicators of population health. It focuses on length of life rather than its quality, but it usefully summarises the health of the population.

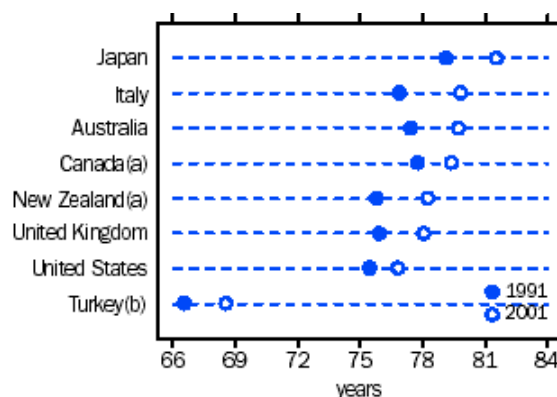
At the start of this millennium, Australia was among the most long-lived of OECD members. Australia was ranked sixth in the OECD for female life expectancy at birth (82 years), and fifth in the OECD for male life expectancy (77 years).

In 2001, Japanese people had the longest life expectancy: a girl born in Japan could expect to live to be 85 and a boy 78. By contrast, Turkey had the lowest life expectancy: Turkish men could expect to live to 66 and Turkish women to 71.

Australian infant mortality rates, however, did not rank as well against other OECD countries. About half the OECD members had lower rates of infant mortality than Australia. In 2001, a little over five Australian babies in every 1,000 died before their first birthday. This was below the figure in the USA (about 7 babies per 1,000) and well below the rates in Mexico (21 babies per 1,000) and Turkey (33 babies per 1,000). But it

was higher than the rates in countries such as Italy and Japan (about four and three babies per 1,000, respectively).

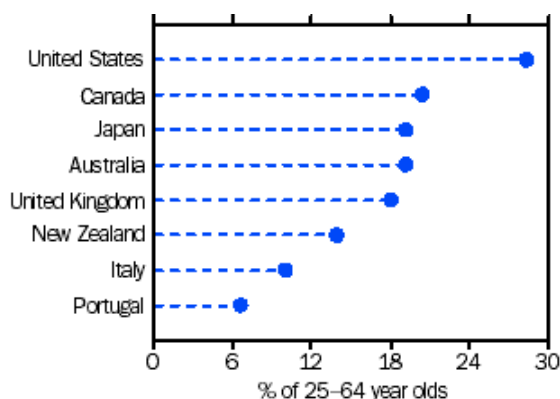
### Life expectancy at birth, 1991 and 2001



(a) Data are for 2000 not 2001. (b) Data are for 2002 not 2001.

Source: OECD World in Figures, 2003. <sup>4</sup>

### Tertiary attainment(a), 2001



(a) Tertiary-type A attainment.

Source: OECD World in Figures, 2003. <sup>4</sup>

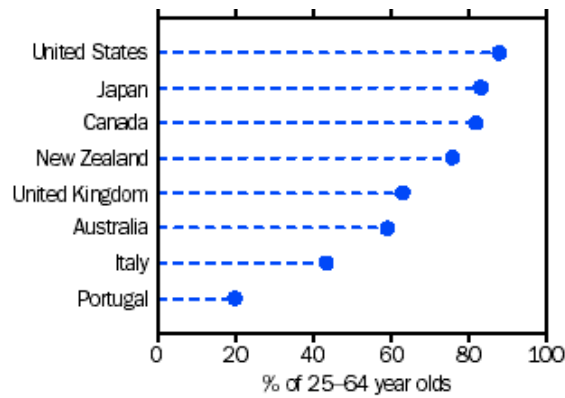
## Education and training

The OECD uses the **proportion of 25 to 64 year olds who attained an upper secondary or higher level qualification**, as a key indicator of a country's education.

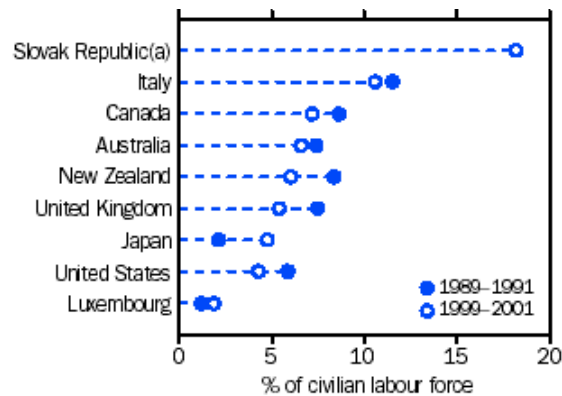
In 2001, there was a wide variation in the proportion of 25-64 year olds with an upper secondary or higher qualification among OECD members, ranging from 88% in the USA to 20% in Portugal. The OECD reported that 59% of Australians in the 25-64 age range had an upper secondary or higher qualification. Eighteen OECD nations had a higher level of attainment, and across the OECD as a whole, some 64% of 25-64 year olds had an upper secondary or higher level qualification.

The OECD also discusses attainment of tertiary qualifications. The OECD reported that just over 19% of Australians in the 25-64 age group had a tertiary qualification in 2001, and that only four OECD members had a higher level of tertiary attainment. Once again there was a wide variation, ranging from more than 28% of American 25-64 year olds with a tertiary qualification, to less than 7% in Portugal and Austria. Some 15% of 25-64 year olds across the OECD as a whole had a tertiary qualification.

### Upper secondary or higher attainment, 2001



**Average unemployment rates, 1991-01 and 1989-91**



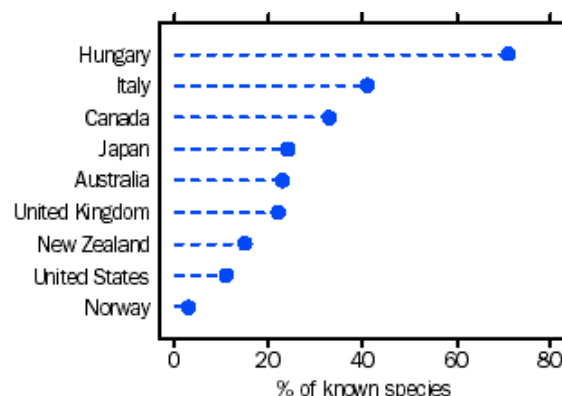
(a) Data not available from the Slovak Republic for 1989-1991.  
Source: OECD World in Figures, 2003, 2002 and 2001.<sup>1</sup>

## Work

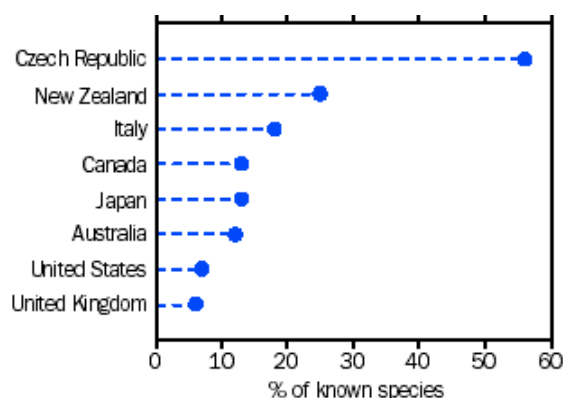
**Measures of Australia's Progress** uses the unemployment rate as its headline indicator of progress in the **Work** dimension. The economic cycle is a major influence on the unemployment rate, and, in any one year, different countries can be at different stages of the economic cycle. In the graph above, the effect of the economic cycle has been removed, to some extent, by averaging data over three years. However, the economic cycle should still be taken into consideration when comparing unemployment rates between countries.

The OECD reported that average unemployment in Australia between 1999 and 2001 stood at 6.6% of the civilian labour force, down from 7.4% between 1989-91. Twelve OECD countries had higher average unemployment than Australia in 1999-01, with Australian rates lower than Canada (7.2%), Italy (10.6%) and the Slovak Republic (18.2%), the highest in the OECD. But our unemployment rate was higher than New Zealand (6%), Japan (4.8%) and the USA (4.3%). The OECD's lowest average unemployment rate during 1999-01 was in Luxembourg (1.9%).

## Threatened(a) mammals, 2003(b)



### Threatened(a) birds, 2003(b)



(a) Species listed by the IUCN as vulnerable to, or endangered with, extinction. Excludes extinct species. (b) The information refers to the latest year for which data are available, which differs between countries.

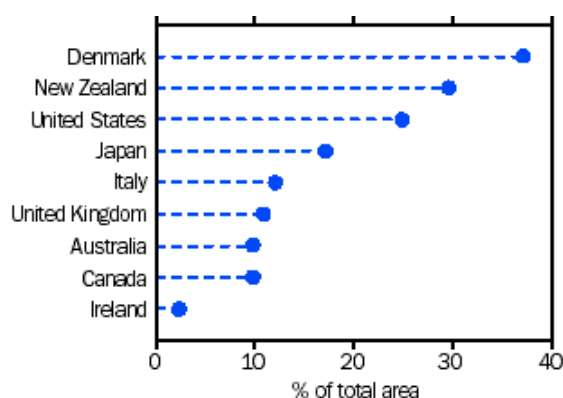
Source: OECD Selected Environmental Data, 2004.<sup>2</sup>

## The natural landscape

The OECD report the percentage of known bird and mammal species in each country that are listed as threatened by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). The IUCN threatened species lists include animals assessed as vulnerable to, or endangered with, extinction. But they do not include species that are extinct, and so differ considerably from the figures used in MAP's headline indicator for biodiversity.

In 2002, the OECD report that 23% of Australia's mammal species and 12% of our bird species are designated as threatened.<sup>3</sup> The proportion of species threatened varied: 71% of Hungary's mammals were threatened, compared to 3% in Norway; 50% of Luxembourg's birds were threatened, compared to 6% in the UK. Twelve of the OECD's thirty members had a greater proportion of mammals that were endangered or vulnerable than in Australia. Twenty five members had a greater proportion of bird species that were threatened.

### Major protected areas(a), 2004 (b)



(a) IUCN categories I-VI. (b) The information refers to the latest year for which data are available, which differs between countries.

Source: OECD Selected Environmental Data, 2004.<sup>2</sup>

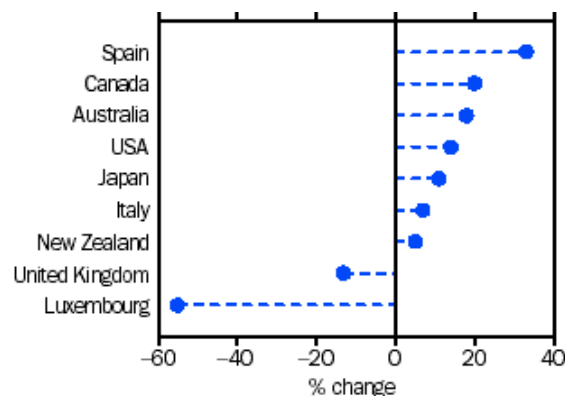
The area of protected land - land inside national parks and the like - is one measure of the protection afforded to a nation's natural landscape. The OECD report that the total land area of each OECD member that was protected ranged from 37% in Denmark to a little over 2% in Ireland. Australia, with 10% (77.4 million hectares) of land protected, was ranked in the middle of the OECD (fifteen of the thirty members had a greater proportion of their land protected than us): the OECD average was a little less than 15%

## International environmental concerns

The change in a nation's emissions of greenhouse gases can be used to compare different countries' response to tackling global warming.

The OECD do not report total greenhouse gas emissions, and so data from the United Nations Greenhouse Gas Inventory database is presented here. These UN figures include emissions of the main greenhouse gases but do not include information about gases released by changes in land use or absorbed into new forest plantations (land use emissions and sinks are included in the Kyoto-based estimates discussed in the headline commentary **International environmental concerns**). The UN database does not include information for 2000 about three OECD members: Korea, Mexico and Turkey.

### Change in greenhouse gas emissions, 1990 and 2000



Source: Data available on request, and compiled from the UNFCCC Greenhouse Gas Inventory database.<sup>4</sup>

Between 1990 and 2000, the UN data show that Australia's greenhouse gas emissions increased by almost 18%, with Australia already starting from a high base (our per capita emissions were the highest among reporting countries).

Greenhouse emissions grew more quickly in five of the 27 reporting countries, and grew most quickly in Spain, rising by one-third over the period. Eleven countries reported a decline in emissions between 1990 and 2000, with the largest decline in Luxembourg where emissions more than halved.

### Endnotes

1. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2003, **OECD in Figures: Statistics on the member countries 2002 edition**, OECD, Paris.
2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2004, **Selected environmental data, 2004** [www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/15/24111692.PDF](http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/11/15/24111692.PDF) last viewed 8 February 2004.
3. Some threatened species occupy, and have always occupied, a restricted geographical range and, under many threatened lists, this restricted range is considered to be inherently threatening to the species. Because of this, at any point in time, these species would always be listed as threatened under some listings systems. It is also worth noting that the conservation status of most of Australia's 2 million or more species is not known, and this is particularly so for invertebrates. Difficulties with assessing progress by referring to changes in the numbers of threatened species are discussed in the 'Biodiversity' section of the **Natural landscape** commentary.
4. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, **Greenhouse Gas Inventory**, <http://ghg.unfccc.int> last viewed 12 February 2004.

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